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# *Historical Sketch*

OF

## *St. Aloysius' Parish*

POTTSTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

Written for the Fiftieth Anniversary of  
the Dedication of the Old Church



BY  
WILLIAM BISHOP SCHUYLER  
1906

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Most Rev. Patrick S. Ryan, D. D., L. L. D.

# INTRODUCTION

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The aim of this sketch is to present some facts about the planting and growth of Catholicity in Pottstown. The treatment is necessarily from a layman's point of view. Much more could be said about the leaders of the people. The clergy, on account of their high position, are better known than the laity, and information relating to the priests can be obtained elsewhere by those who wish, but there is danger of losing all record of the rank and file of the faithful unless they are remembered in a book like this. How much does the present generation know about the early congregation? When the ones that were acquainted with those early Catholics are, in the course of natural events, removed from this earth, it is to be hoped that in these pages will be found some memorials of those people who laid the foundation of the blessings we now enjoy.

This book is not a complete history. It contains merely some of the raw material which may recall to the older parishioners other facts relating to the past. In the first part the attempt is made to give some idea of the development of Catholicity from the missionary period of this section when the faithful were few in number, to the present time, when the ministrations of our religion are obtained with comparative ease. In the last part is a record of events you are more familiar with, which will be more interesting to future generations.

For information I have drawn upon the memories of those who have lived here before and since the parish was



founded. I record with pleasure my obligation to the following: My Mother; Mrs. Daniel Healy; Annie C. Hofman; Joseph M. Yohn; Jacob M. Yohn; Patrick Dunn; Frank Ziegler; A. K. Shaner; John Foreman; Thomas E. Mullen, of Phoenixville; Mrs. Kate Rigney and several others.

The following are some of those who gave kind assistance in procuring data: Rev. Edward J. Curran; Geo. N. Malsberger; Mrs. M. A. Rehill; Frank Missimer; J. Allen Healy.

The authorities quoted are: Shea's History of the Catholic Church in America; Pennsylvania Archives; Goshenhoppen Sacramental Register; Sacramental Register of St. Aloysius' Church; History of St. Charles' Theological Seminary; History of Pottstown, written in 1876, by L. H. Davis; Record of the descendants of Anna Maria Jones, extracts of which were kindly furnished by Mrs. Margaret R. Knipe.

W. B. S

Pottstown, May 21, 1906.



## CHAPTER I.

# PIONEERS

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Those who attended the old St. Aloysius Church, remember a plain, gray, plaster-covered building, its right wall and roof touched by the branches of a weeping willow tree.

It is fitting that this sketch begin with the time before that church was built, when our forefathers, who, believing that the Church provided certain means of grace without which they could not be saved, underwent many inconveniences in order to practice their religion.

In 1808, when the diocese of Philadelphia was organized, the Catholic Church nearest to Pottstown, named Pottsgrove at that time, was at Goshenhoppen, now Bally. This church was thirteen miles distant. It was then a Jesuit mission. To hear Mass and receive the Sacraments, the small number of Catholics in this vicinity, therefore, journeyed thirteen miles.

Our town, at that time, was a hamlet of about forty dwellings. It had two places of worship, the Old Brick Church and the Friends' Meeting House.<sup>1</sup>

The principal Catholics residing hereabouts were two sisters, Mrs. Anne Maria Jones and Mrs. Catherine Malsberger, and their families. These two women were daughters of Melchior Schoener, or Shaner, a German, who came here in 1742.<sup>2</sup>

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See pages 62, 63 and 64 for notes.

Mrs. Jones was a woman of affairs and business ability. She owned considerable property about town. On a lot with a frontage of about 150 feet, on High street, located about the site of Van Buskirk's store, were several buildings, including her dwelling house, dry goods and grocery store and a tavern. A tract of land north of Beech street was also her property.<sup>3</sup>

Mrs. Jones' tenacity to her faith was conspicuous to non-Catholics. From one outside of the Church I learned that, in spite of the fact that her children married Protestants, she looked carefully after the faith of her grandchildren. Of this one example can be given. The late Frederick S. Missimer, a son of her daughter Anna, was one of the most prominent of those who built the first church. This daughter, Anna, taught Catechism to the Catholic children, in her house, on High street, later occupied by this son.

Mrs. Jones was born May 22, 1753; was married three times. When quite young she became the wife of George Leaf, an Englishman, whose death occurred during the early part of the Revolution. Her second husband was Englebert Mintzer, this marriage taking place about 1779. This man died February 24, 1791. Amos Jones subsequently became the third husband.<sup>4</sup>

Six children were the result of these three marriages. By the first union there were two children—George Leaf and Catherine Leaf, who married Frederick Smith. By the second marriage there were two sons and a daughter, the sons being William Mintzer and Joseph Mintzer, who died in 1812, and was buried on his mother's property, north of Pottsgrove. The daughter, by the Mintzer marriage, was Anna, or Nancy, who married Henry Missimer. As a result of the marriage with Amos Jones one daughter was born, Sarah Jones, who married Benjamin Johnson.

Mrs. Jones died November 13, 1813, and was interred near the body of her son, Joseph. Her will, which was probated November 17, 1813, contained a clause which established the first Catholic place for interment. It provided for a "reserving about half an acre for a burial ground, being that part of the ground where Joseph Mintzer was buried, with liberty to pass and to go to and from the same at all times either to bury others and to see the graves of those who may be buried there."<sup>5</sup>

This plot of ground was located at what is now the intersection of Evans street and Lincoln avenue. Neither street existed at the time the graveyard was established. Access was had by a right of way through the farm, between the graveyard and the Swamp road, now Charlotte street.<sup>6</sup>

This burial ground, as every one knows, has recently been sold, and several houses are already standing where once were interred the remains of the early Catholics, which have been transferred to other cemeteries.

After the new St. Aloysius Cemetery was laid out, the body of Mrs. Jones was transferred by her grandson, Frederick S. Missimer, to his lot, where you can read, on the old-time tombstone of table shape, the following:

ANNA MARIA JONES,

Died Nov. 13, 1813,

Aged 60 years, 5 months and 20 days.

The life of Catherine was not so varied. She became the wife of Jacob Malsberger,<sup>7</sup> previous to the marriage of her sister, Anna. At the baptism of the Malsbergers' first-born child, Jacob, in 1768, at Goshenhoppen, Anna M. Schoner was the god-mother. To the Malsbergers nine children were born. Two died young, five removed to



other places. Two stayed in this vicinity, Elizabeth, who remained unmarried, and Jacob, 2d, whose descendants here are very numerous.<sup>8</sup>

The farm upon which the Malsbergers lived was situated along the Swamp road. I have not been able to ascertain the location with certainty. The southern boundary seems to agree with an old property line followed now by Jefferson avenue, while there is also a tradition in the Malsberger family that he owned land around the Ringing Rocks.<sup>9</sup>

Jacob Malsberger prospered in worldly affairs as his family increased. In 1769 he owned 140 acres of land in New Hanover township.<sup>10</sup> In 1774 his farm had increased to 180 acres.<sup>11</sup> In 1780 he paid a state tax on a valuation of 4800 pounds.<sup>12</sup> At the time of his death, in 1805, his property comprised about 240 acres.<sup>13</sup>

He was buried in the church-yard at Goshenhoppen. His widow survived him several years. She was interred in the Mintzer burial ground.

Jacob Malsberger, 2d, married Mary Kihn, or Keene, whom he met at his sister's home, in Conewago.<sup>14</sup> He brought his wife to his farm, comprising land along the Swamp road, at the present northern boundary of Pottstown. Their house stood near the site of the power house of the Pottstown & Northern Railway. The following children were born to them: Joseph, married Judith Detwiler; John, born 1798, married Mary Mauger; Aaron, born 1801, died 1846, married Elizabeth McCoy. (They lived in the house on King street, on the property recently purchased for an armory. Mass was said in this house.) George, married Rebecca Ruth; Mary, married George Sterling; Sarah, born 1815, married John Yohn; Catherine, married Isaac Smith. Except Mary, all of these children married non-Catholics. As a result of these marriages,

over thirty children were born, many of whom are still living.

### GOSHENHOPPEN

Before continuing this narrative, let us go back to the founding of the church attended by these pioneer Catholics.

We will first consult a reference in an article written during the life of these people. Right Rev. John Carrol, in his report of the "Condition of the Church in America," made, under direction of the Propaganda, when he was appointed Prefect Apostolic, gives the following account of the church at Goshenhoppen:<sup>15</sup>

In 1741 two German Jesuits were sent to Pennsylvania for the instruction and conversion of German emigrants, who, from many parts of Germany, had come into that province." He tells us that these missionaries were Fr. Schneider, from Bavaria, and Fr. Wapeler, from the lower Rhine.

He tells us further that Rev. Theodore Schneider "formed many congregations in Pennsylvania, built by his activity and energy, a noble church at Coshenhoppen and spread the faith of Christ far and near." The other priest, Rev. William Wapeler established a mission at Conewago.

In regard to the founding of the Goshenhoppen Church, Dr. Shea tells us that: "In February, 1743, Father Schneider came to Goshenhoppen, where he purchased land of a Beidler, a Mennonist, who had fallen out with the Brotherhood, and to mortify them sold his property to a Catholic priest. At the last moment he demanded security, but Father Schneider at once handed over the full amount and took the deed."

Father Schneider labored at Goshenhoppen and its missions for 21 years, until his death, in 1764. He was

succeeded by Rev. John Baptist Ritter, also a Jesuit, who remained in charge until 1785.

The Sacramental register of Goshenhoppen, begun by Fr. Schneider, contains the names of many of the pioneer Catholics of this vicinity.<sup>16</sup> For over seventy-five years these people looked for spiritual matters to the Jesuit mission, 13 miles distant, to which they even carried their children for baptism. The following children of Jacob and Catherine Malsberger were baptized at Goshenhoppen by Father Ritter:

JACOB MALSBERGER, born June 2, 1768, baptized June 26, 1768.

CATHERINE MALSBERGER, born June 28, 1771, baptized July 28, 1771.

JOHN MALSBERGER, born April 9, 1774, baptized May 22, 1774. (Died young.)

JOHN GEORGE MALSBERGER, born June 28, 1776, baptized August 11, 1776. (Died young.)

SUSANNA MALSBERGER, born September 21, 1779, baptized November 1, 1779.

MARGARET MALSBERGER, born May 15, 1782, baptized June 23, 1782.

The churchyard at Bally also furnishes testimony that the early Catholics of this vicinity were identified with that Jesuit mission. We will find there the graves of several Malsbergers. Among the number is the previously mentioned Jacob Malsberger.

It is difficult to realize the adverse circumstances under which these pioneer Catholics practiced their faith. Outside of their families the associations were non-Catholic. This church was at a distance. Attendance at Mass and reception of the Sacraments was not often. All the children of Jacob, 2d, married non-Catholics except one. Sometimes the Catholics attended reformed services in the Old Brick Church, Hanover and Walnut streets.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of these difficulties, there were some instances of piety. The wife of Jacob Malsberger, 2d, is a good ex-



ample of strong faith. Her often expressed wish was to be buried in the churchyard at Goshenhoppen, giving as her reason that she got tired many times from walking to the church, and, after her death, she wanted her body to lie near the altar from which the Holy Sacrifice was offered. One is not so soon forgotten when buried near the church.

For several years after the diocese was organized, Catholics here continued to receive the ministrations of the priests at Goshenhoppen. Rev. Aug. Bally, S. J., occasionally said Mass in the houses of Aaron Malsberger; his sister, Mrs. John Yohn; and Mrs. Henry Missimer.<sup>18</sup>



Rev. Augustin J. Bally, S. J. Born March 8, 1806; died Jan. 30, 1832.  
(Courtesy of the American Catholic Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pa.)



## CHAPTER II.

### Increase of Catholicity

When commercial activity commenced, other Catholics were brought here. Irish representatives of our faith came to mingle with the descendants of the German emigrants. In the construction of the canal of the Schuylkill Navigation Company, which was chartered February 13, 1810, several of the workmen were Catholics.

Tradition tells us, some of them, dying of fever and ague contracted from the damp earth in which they worked, were interred in the Mintzer burial ground.

Of more permanent advantage to our faith was the operation of the canal. A number of the boatmen were Catholics, who, in the winter time, lived near Port Union, across the river from Douglassville. As they prospered they bought farms in that vicinity and established their homes there. The first Catholic settler was Henry Flannery, a contractor, who was followed by Matthew Ryan and his wife. Then came the following:

Michael Gillen, Thomas Gunson, John Hannigan, James Healy, Daniel Healy, Timothy Lyons, Patrick Moloney, Michael Ryan, John Ryan, James Bradley.

Every three months Mass was said at Port Union, principally by Father Bally. On the Sunday that this priest came, these boatmen and their families assembled for Mass in the Black Bear Hotel, conducted by Matthew Ryan.<sup>1</sup>

After a few years these good people provided a chapel for themselves. Henry Flannery, who owned the farm now occupied by his son, D. K. Flannery, donated land fronting on the south side of the Schuylkill road. Upon this site the chapel of St. Paul was built by subscription of the boatmen. In 1846 the church was dedicated, Father Bally celebrating the first Mass.

On the front page of the book in which the register of baptisms is recorded, is the following inscription, neatly printed:

BAPTISM REGISTER  
of St. Paul's Church,  
Union Township,  
Berks County,  
Penna.  
June 29th, 1846.

The signature of Rev. F. M. Lucas, S. J., is at the bottom of the first record, June 28, 1846. After this are records of 30 baptisms, until the first resident pastor of Pottstown attended Douglassville, as follows:

By Rev. Aug. Bally, S. J.....	3	baptisms
“ “ R. O'Farrel.....	24	“
“ “ McArdle .....	1	“
“ “ P. I. Neumann.....	2	“

In 1815, our town received a borough charter, and the name was changed from Pottsgrove to Pottstown. The town extended from the Schuylkill river north to Beech street, and from the Manatawny Creek east to Adams street. The area was about 270 acres.

In 1826 the population was about 650, and the town had 120 dwellings.

On December 9, 1839, the first train passed over the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad.



In 1840 the population of Pottstown was 721.

With the building of the railroad the old era of inaction was over. Modern progress was felt in Pottstown. Had the railroad not passed through our town, it would still be a country village. The few Catholics would be going to Goshenhoppen to Mass, after the manner of past generations. In the first ninety years of our borough's existence the population had become only about seven hundred, and the Catholics were, with a few exceptions, descendants of the German emigrants, who came in the infancy of our town. In the new order of things the Catholic population was leavened with and stimulated by natives of Ireland, who came to Pottstown to work for the railroad company.

In 1844 the shops for the maintenance of the railroad were located here.<sup>2</sup> Pottstown was then the centre from which the supplies for the railroad were distributed. The departments here were the carpenter shop, on South street, now occupied by the March, Brownback Company; the machine shop, on the site of the freight house; the blacksmith shop, replaced by the Swift Company building; the woodyard, material yard, pumping station and offices of the officials, such as John Osborn, chief engineer; his brother, Richard, assistant engineer; and others, including J. Dutton Steele, William H. Bines, John C. DaCosta, George Rice and C. W. Bucholtz.

After the parish of Phoenixville was organized and a resident pastor stationed there, Pottstown was made a mission of that place. Father O'Farrel, or his assistant, Father Quinn, came to Pottstown on an occasional Sunday and said Mass and administered the Sacraments in dwellings. About once every three months these visitations took place, and the Catholics gathered to assist at the Holy Sacrifice in the homes of either Frederick S. Missi-



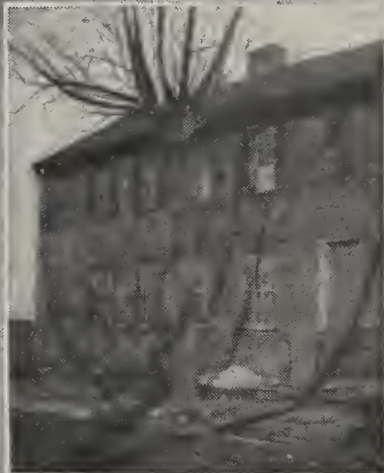
HOUSE OF FREDERICK S. MISSIMER



HOUSE OF JAMES WOODS



HOUSE OF AARON MALSBERGER



HOUSE OF ANTHONY DUNN  
ON THE LEFT  
HOUSE OF DANIEL BURKE  
ON THE RIGHT

Houses in Pottstown where Mass was Said Before the Church was Built

mer, James Woods, Daniel Burke, Michael Dunn, Anthony Dunn, John Donnelly<sup>4</sup> and John Kelly. On these occasions the Sacraments of Baptism, Penance, Holy Eucharist and Matrimony were administered.

The old custom of going to Goshenhoppen for Mass was still continued by some. After the chapel at Douglassville was built, the Potstown Catholics profited by the visits of priests to that place. When a priest was expected at Douglassville, word was sent to Pottstown, and early Sunday morning witnessed the movement of the faithful to Douglassville. Some of the railroaders took their families on trucks, or "manual levers;" others walked or went by carriage.<sup>5</sup>







The Old Church

## CHAPTER III.

### The First Catholic Church

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As early as 1846, some Catholic minds received the idea of a church in Pottstown. In a deed dated August 11, 1846, by which Dr. George VanBuskirk conveyed to Robert Gue two adjoining lots in Pottsgrove Township, east of the present church property, the following reference is made to the ground subsequently occupied by our church:

“Beginning in the line of Beech street at a corner of Lot No. 2, intended to be conveyed to the Catholic Society of Pottstown.”

On Sept. 14, 1846, Geo. VanBuskirk conveyed to Rt. Rev. Francis P. Kenrick, head of this diocese, the tract of land on the north side of Beech street, at the junction of Hanover street.

The ground was just outside the northern border of Pottstown, Beech street. Evidently the low price was the reason that induced the Catholic Society to choose ground outside of the borough limits.

About ten years after the location here of the railroad shops, the movement for the building of a Catholic Church was begun. A regular parish was formed and thus one more unit was added to the Philadelphia Diocese. The consent of Bishop Neumann was obtained. Under the direction of Father O'Farrel the people set to work.

Rev. Philip O'Farrel, to whom is due the credit of inspiring the undertaking, was ordained December 24, 1843.

He was appointed to Phoenixville in 1846, at the age of 34. He died in 1869, and at the time of his death was one of the Bishop's counsellors.<sup>6</sup>

### — CONGREGATION THAT BUILT THE FIRST CHURCH

The following list of the Pottstown Catholics, in 1854, is based upon the record of subscriptions to the building fund, found among the papers of F. S. Missimer, deceased.

The information in regard to the occupations was obtained, principally, from Mr. John Foreman, (non-Catholic), who came to Pottstown when the railroad shops were established, and for over fifty years was associated with the railroad.

To Mr. Patrick Dunn and Mr. Jacob Yohn I am also indebted for much information regarding the occupations of their fellow-railroaders. It will be noticed that the majority were employed in the railroad yard. They performed the various duties necessary in storing and distributing the material needed for the repairs of the road.

As far as is known, the congregation was as follows:

JOHN A. ANDRE came to Pottstown from Goshenhoppen, having been encouraged by Father Bally. Mr. Andre was apprenticed to Wm. Leh, a watchmaker and dentist, whose place of business is now H. A. Custer's store on High street. Leh later sold out his business to Andre, after the latter had finished his apprenticeship.

Mr. Andre was a musician of local note. He was the first organist and choir leader in St. Aloysius Church, serving in that capacity for many years.

PATRICK ARMSTRONG, a blacksmith for the railroad.

PHILIP BRADY, employed in the railroad yard.

MICHAEL BROWN, railroad carpenter.

DANIEL BRIEN, employed on the material train. Married Margaret Crowley, April 30, 1854.

JOHN BLAKE, railroad employe.

DANIEL BURKE, employed on material train. Mass was said in his house.

JAMES CLARK, employed in railroad yard.

PATRICK DELANEY, employed in railroad yard.

JAMES DOWNEY, supervisor on section of railroad between Pottstown and Phoenixville.

The four brothers:

ANTHONY DUNN, carpenter for railroad, brought his family from Ireland about 1844. Lived on Charlotte street. Mass was said in his house. His wife made the altar breads consecrated at the Masses in private houses, and after the church was built until the time of Father Sorrenteni.

JOSEPH DUNN, blacksmith-helper in railroad shop.

JOHN DUNN, repairman on railroad.

MICHAEL DUNN, night watchman in railroad shops, came from Ireland with his family. Mass was said in his house.

PATRICK DUNN, locomotive fireman, son of Michael Dunn, married Catharine McKenna, June 17, 1855, in James Wood's house.

JEFFREY FANNIN, laborer employed by Mr. Missimer on the sill train.

JOHN FULLEN, kept a hotel on the site now occupied by the cold storage plant.

PETER GARVEY, employed in the railroad yard.

MICHAEL GANNON, operated the engine for pumping water for the locomotives.

JAMES GRACE, employed by Mr. Missimer on the sill train.

JAMES GREEN, placed switches for the railroad.

ROBERT GUE, a contractor, came here with his family and built a house on land near the Ringing Rocks. He was one of the prime movers in building the church.

JOHN HERD, employed by Mr. Missimer on the sill train.

P. HERD, repairsman on the railroad.

PATRICK HIGGINS, employed in the railroad yard.

DR. MICHAEL J. HOFMAN was a prominent citizen as well as physician. From his daughter, Annie C. Hofman, the following particulars about his life have been obtained:

He was born July 4, 1802, in Bitthardt by Wurtzburg, Bavaria. His father was Dr. John George Hofman, whose father and grandfather were also physicians. Thus the subject of this sketch was the fourth in the line of descent in the medical profession. The family was a good Catholic one. Michael was graduated from the University of Wurtzburg before he was eighteen, and then entered Heidelberg University, from which he received the degree of M.D. At the age of twenty-one years he entered the French Army as a surgeon, going with the army to Africa, where he spent thirteen years in the service. On account of his ability and bravery he was advanced to the position of Second Surgeon-general of the French Army in



Africa. In 1836 he resigned and, after visiting his home in Germany, set sail for America, arriving in New York, October 28, 1836. He went to Philadelphia, and then came to Pottstown, where he settled and was afterward married.

Doctor Hoiman always took a deep interest in the affairs of the town. He was among the number who foresaw the development in store for Pottstown. In 1853 he was elected a member of town council, and as a member of the street committee insisted upon cutting down and filling up streets, in spite of strong opposition. Through his energy many other improvements were made.

His strength of character was evidenced in the practice of his religion. Although his wife was a non-Catholic, their two daughters became devout Catholics.

PATRICK HOOLIHAN, employed on the ballast train.

PATRICK KENNEDY, worked for Dr. Meigs at the Hill School and other places around town.

DAVID KENNEDY, watchman at Hanover street.

JOHN KELLY, employed as carpenter on railroad. Mass was said in his house.

JOHN KEHOUGH, repairsman on railroad.

PATRICK LEVAY, a fireman; married Helen Kennedy, December 25, 1855. Killed on the railroad.

ANDREW LONERGAN, repairman on railroad.

MICHAEL LONERGAN, employed in railroad yard.

PETER MARA, employed in railroad yard.

FRANK McGIRK, employed as railroad carpenter.

PATRICK McCLOSKEY, employed in railroad yard.

PHILIP MURPHY, employed by Mr. Missimer on the sill train.

JOHN MURPHY, night watchman at railroad station, and then succeeded Fullen in the hotel business.

FREDERICK S. MISSIMER, a grandson of Mrs. Anna Maria Jones, and son of Mrs. Anna Missimer, who taught Sunday school at her home.

Mr. Missimer was a carpenter by trade. After the railroad was built he had charge of the sill train, making trips on the railroad to buy sills from the farmers and lumber men.

When Father O'Farrel began the movement for a church in Pottstown, Mr. Missimer acted as treasurer of the building fund. Mass was said in his residence quite often. The house is now occupied by his son, Frank Missimer.

JOHN PEYTON, railroad carpenter; married Kate, daughter of Anthony Dunn.

EDWARD RAIDY, employed in the railroad yard.

JOHN SELINGER came from Germany and engaged in the restaurant business. He was a singer in the choir.

JOHN SHERIDAN, repairsman on the railroad.

JOHN B. SNYDER came from Goshenhoppen. He was a jeweler and watchmaker, having his place of business in the store occupied by W. I. Hartenstine.

PETER TIGHE was one of the first Catholics brought here to work on the railroad, helping in its construction.

JOHN B. WELSH was a rigger in the shops of the railroad, supplying tackle of all kinds and hose for the water stations. On August 31, 1851, he was married to Bridget Crowley in the house of Daniel Burke, by Rev. Philip O'Farrel.

This is the first marriage recorded in the register, having been transferred from the Phoenixville register by Father Cook.

JAMES WOODS, employed by the railroad to run a stationary engine in the carpenter shop. He married Elizabeth Silver, who lived with the Gue family on Ringing Hill. In his residence, South Charlotte street, Mass was said frequently. He was a teacher in the Sunday school after the building of the church.

MRS. JOHN YOHN, whose husband established the carriage works now conducted by his sons, Joseph and Jacob.

John Yohn, although a non-Catholic, was one of the committee of three appointed to solicit subscriptions for the building of the church. He became a Catholic in 1883, about six months before his death.

After the completion of the church, Mrs. Yohn took care of the altar.

CATHARINE ZIEGLER, a widow who earned her living working by the day in the homes around town. She was the mother of Frank Ziegler.

### **CONTRIBUTORS TO BUILDING FUND OF OLD CHURCH**

The original subscription book, dated 1854, found by Mr. Frank Missimer, in his father's desk, has been placed at my disposal. On the first page is the following appeal for funds:

"We, the undersigned Inhabitants of the Borough of Pottstown, do authorize Mr. F. S. Missimer, the bearer of this, to collect such monies as the Charitable and well-disposed People may feel willing to Contribute towards the Erection of a Roman Catholic Church in





our Borough. Our Roman Catholic Inhabitants have till now been deprived of a place of divine worship of their own. They intend now to erect one if they can obtain the funds, and, therefore, will feel gratefully obliged to all Such as will Contribute their Mite toward the erection of the same.

"F. S. MISSIMER,  
"JOHN YOHN,  
"JAMES WOODS."

After this appeal follow the names of the subscribers, which are herewith given as they appear in the book, except for the omission of the marks "pd" and "\*" in connection with the names. The names are spelled exactly as in the original book. The list is as follows:

Peter Tighe .....	\$30 00	Alexander Malsberger .....	5 00
James Woods .....	25 00	John Foreman .....	5 00
John Walsh .....	25 00	Bowyer Brooke ... ..	10 00
James Green .....	25 00	J. D. Streeper .....	5 00
John Murphy .....	25 00	Jos. E. Yeager .....	5 00
John Kelly .....	25 00	Geist & Kulp .....	5 00
Michael Gannon .....	25 00	Levi E. Kinzer .....	5 00
F. S. Missimer .....	25 00	Robert Gue .....	10 00
Michael Brown .....	20 00	John B. Powell .....	5 00
Anthony Dun .....	15 00	Dr. M. J. Hoffman ...	50 00
Pat. Armstrong .....	20 00	E. Ellicott .....	5 00
James Grace .....	15 00	M. D. Evans .....	5 00
Peter Garvey .....	10 00	Umstead Wells .....	5 00
Daniel Brine .....	10 00	P. Herd .....	5 00
Jeffrey Fannin .....	10 00	Daniel Burk .....	10 00
Joseph Dunn .....	10 00	H. F. Yohn .....	5 00
Patrick Delaney .....	10 00	John Selinger .....	5 00
Andrew Lonagan .....	10 00	Patrick Gray .....	22 00
John Dunn .....	10 00	G. Hine .....	5 00
Frank McGirk .....	5 00	C. Zeigler .....	10 00
David Kennedy .....	5 00	Michael Dunn .....	7 00
Allen Roberts .....	5 00	John Beatty .....	5 00
Edward Rady .....	5 00	John A. Andre .....	10 00
John Herd .....	5 00	Abr. Gulden .....	5 00
Patrick Levay .....	5 00	Henry Flannery .....	10 00
Philip Murphy .....	5 00	Patrick Malone .....	5 00
John Ryne .....	20 00	James Haley .....	5 00
S. A. Stout .....	5 00	Thomas Gunson .....	5 00
James Rittenhouse ...	20 00	John Henigan .....	5 00
Jesse R. Casselberry..	5 00	Michael Gillen .....	5 00
J. Dutton Steele .....	10 00	Edward Towel .....	5 00
A. Evans .....	5 00	John B. Snyder .....	5 00
Patrick Kennedy .....	5 00	John Blake .....	7 00
Patrick Hollahand ...	5 00		



In the back of the book is the following list, entitled "First for Church," evidently an account of money collected on account and from railroad men, who gave donations to the bearer of the book.

Thomas Fannen .....	\$1 00	Patrick Higgins .....	1 00
Michael Ryan .....	2 00	Patrick McCloskey ....	1 00
James Bradley .....	1 00	Name almost erased ...	2 00
Daniel Haley .....	2 00	Name almost erased ...	2 00
Timothy Lyons .....	2 00	Name almost erased ...	5 00
Wm. O'Brien .....	1 00	E. Shenk .....	3 00
Mrs. Ann Ryan .....	2 00	John Fullen .....	2 00
Joseph Clark .....	1 00	Dr. Tobias .....	2 50
John Ryan .....	1 00	John Malsberger .....	2 00
Henry Flannery .....	2 00	Jacob Malsberger .....	5 00
Mrs. Monahan .....	2 00	Englebert Hanley .....	1 00
Patrick Dun .....	4 00	James Linch .....	1 50
Michael Lonagan .....	3 00	E. J. Weidner ....	2 00
Aaron Schwenk .....	3 00	A. L. Custer .....	2 00
James Clark .....	2 50	John Sheridan .....	1 50
Timothy Horn .....	2 50	John Flanigan .....	1 00
Thomas Smith .....	2 50	John Kahough .....	1 00
Matthew .....	2 50	James Commiskey ....	1 00
Elizabeth McGrady ...	1 00	Hugh Farley .....	1 00
John Watson .....	5 00	Hugh Graben .....	1 00
Peter Myers .....	5 00	Michael Bau .....	1 00
James Downey .....	5 00	Pat McKeon .....	1 00
Albert Malsberger ....	3 00	Henry Engle .....	1 00
James Large .....	2 50	Philip Brady .....	5 00
Hiram Feger .....	2 00	Pat Bridgen .....	5 00
David Warley .....	1 00	John Paten .....	5 00
Amos Reifsnyder .....	2 00	Thomas Horn .....	5 00
Samuel Lightcap .....	2 00	Wm. Forrest .....	5 00
John Schweinhart .....	2 00	Levi Mock .....	2 50
H. B. Smull .....	1 00	Peter Marra .....	5 00

Following is a copy of another page in the book:

#### Monies Collected for Church

Laying of Corner Stone.....	\$24 00
From Rev. P. O'Farrel.....	50 00
John Watson .....	24 00
Collected at Church.....	13 61
From Rev. M. Neuman.....	200 00
Collected at Dedication .....	60 00
From Rev. P. O'Farrel.....	50 00
From James Downey.....	11 00

On the opposite page is the following:

Paid to Davis & Co., by Father O'Farrel.... \$97 74

At the top of another page is the date 1854. Then appear the same items as above and the following addition:

John Yohn ..... \$40 00

Many of the contributors named in the foregoing list were non-Catholics, among whom were the following:

S. A. STOUT, superintendent of railroad.

J. DUTTON STEELE, chief engineer of railroad; succeeded Mr. Osborne about 1848.

JOHN WATSON, track supervisor between Pottstown and Phoenixville.

PETER MYERS, employed in Potts rolling mill.

H. F. YOHN, conducted the "Farmers' Hotel," now the "Shuler House."

ABR. GULDIN, kept the "Pottstown Hotel," now "The Merchants'."

JOHN BEATTY, proprietor of the axe factory on-site of Miller & Griess' flour mill.

J. D. STREEPER, proprietor of The Montgomery Ledger.

GEIST & KULP, dealers in hardware; store now M. W. Baily's.

LEVI E. KINZER, coal business; now Fegely's.

UMSTEAD WELLS, dealer in dry goods and groceries in store now occupied by the Boston Clothing Store.

M. D. EVANS, taught school before studying law.

JOHN B. POWELL, watchmaker and jeweler; store now occupied by W. I. Hartenstine.

A. L. CUSTER, post office and stationery store.

JESSE R. CASSELBERRY, butcher; afterwards became a physician.

A. EVANS, book store.

JAMES RITTENHOUSE, retired.

AMOS REIFSNYDER, dealer in flour and feed.

DR. TOBIAS, kept a drug store in a frame building on site now occupied by Dives, Pomeroy & Stewart.

HENRY ENGLE, hatter.

JOHN FOREMAN, foreman of P. & R. carpenter shop.

JOSEPH E. YEAGER, foreman of P. & R. blacksmith shop.

BOWYER BROOKE, superintendent of P. & R. yard from which material was distributed.

DAVID WARLEY, locomotive engineer.

SAMUEL LIGHTCAP, locomotive engineer.

JOHN SCHWEINHART, locomotive engineer.

ALEXANDER MALSBERGER, locomotive engineer.

ALBERT MALSBERGER, locomotive engineer.

### CORNER-STONE LAYING

The cellar-digging and foundation work were done without pay by members of the congregation.<sup>1</sup> The men worked in the evening, continuing their labor by lantern light after dark.

In the summer of 1854 the corner-stone was laid. Forty-four years after this event the stone was removed when the old church was torn down.<sup>2</sup>

A tin box inside contained the following papers:

Boston Pilot, of Saturday, June 17, 1854.

New York Herald, Friday, June 30, 1854.

The Catholic Instructor, Philadelphia, Saturday, July 29, 1854.

The Pennsylvanian, Friday, August 4, 1854, and another newspaper, badly decayed.

The Catholic Instructor is especially interesting because it contained an announcement of the corner-stone laying, as follows:

Pottstown, New Church.—We learn that the corner-stone of a new church is to be laid on Sunday next, 30th inst., at Pottstown. The Very Rev. Edw. J. Sourin, V. G., will officiate on the occasion. To the zeal of the Reverend Philip O'Farrell, of Phoenixville, the Catholics of this district are mainly indebted for the commencement of this new temple for the worship of the Living God.

This is the third church which has been commenced under the auspices of the Rev. Mr. O'Farrell, the two others have been completed, as we trust the third shall be under the protection of Divine Providence.

The following extract from the Catholic Herald, Philadelphia, Aug. 17, 1854, shows that the corner-stone was laid on July 30, 1854 :

“The corner stone of a Catholic Church was laid with the usual ceremonies at Pottstown, in this State, on the 30th inst. (ult.), by the Very Rev. E. J. Sourin. The Rev. Mr. O’Farrell, of Phoenixville, officiates there.”

### DEDICATION

On the day of the dedication a special train brought Father O’Farrell and many of his congregation from Phoenixville, Patrick McGill carrying the priest’s vestments on his arm. The choir from St. Mary’s Church came to furnish the music. The soprano soloists were Mrs. Samuel O’Neill and Miss Eliza McElhone. In the party were the following choir-members, who are still living: Miss Mary McQuade, Mrs. Bridgetina Gallagher, Mrs. John Gilmore, Miss Ann English and Samuel O’Neill.

Peter’s Mass in D was sung, John McAlister, of Phoenixville, playing the melodion. The sermon was preached by Rev. Daniel Sheridan, of St. Michael’s Church, Philadelphia. In the account book of Frederick S. Missimer is a record of \$60 collected at the dedication. Mr. Mullin tells me that the Phoenixville people gave their contributions in gold.

The members of St. Aloysius congregation entertained the visitors at their homes. At Frederick S. Missimer’s house the choir had dinner.

Those who had attended the dedication were shocked when news came of the tragic death of Father Sheridan, on July 17, 1856. An excursion train carrying his Sunday school ran into another train on the North Penn Railroad. Many lives were lost.



This accident has been the date by which the dedication of the church is remembered. There are two ideas as to the time that elapsed between the visit of Father Sheridan to Pottstown and his death. Some of those who heard him preach, think that he was killed only a few weeks after the dedication, while others assert that over a year after the dedication the tragic event occurred. If the former contention is true the dedication was in 1856, while if the latter is correct the date would be 1855, or one year after the corner-stone laying.<sup>3</sup>

After the above had been sent to the printers, we received, from the Rev. Thomas C. Middleton, information that removes all doubt as to the date of the dedication. Fr. Middleton has copied from Bishop Neumann's "Mission Register" all data bearing on the Dedication of Churches in the Diocese of Philadelphia. The following extract shows that St. Aloysius' Church was dedicated in 1856:

POTTSTOWN, S. ALOYSIUS.—  
Church built by Rev. Philip O'Farrell and assistants.  
1856 [June] 22, Church blessed by Rev. Philip O'Farrell.

#### DESCRIPTION OF OLD CHURCH

When the church was built, the section of Hanover street, north of Beech street, was unopened. Few houses were near. Solitary, indeed, was the location, but with what joy did the founders go toward that plain building! They recall those Sunday mornings. Once more they see the priest upon the altar, the sunlight streaming through the windows upon the reverent congregation, while the branches of the willow tree outside wave against the windows—Nature's accompaniment to the Sublime Mysteries taking place within the Sanctuary.

Before leaving this subject, a brief description of the old church might be appropriate:

The building was a short distance back from the street, in the middle of the churchyard. From the gate in the white fence, along Beech street, a walk about 60 feet long led through the yard to the gable end of the church, which was of stone, covered with plaster.

When you entered the building, your glance, passing over the backs of the plain pews, separated by two aisles, rested upon the white-painted altar in a sanctuary enclosed by a railing which curved at the ends to meet the wall. The aisles met the curved ends of the railing. Between the left end of the railing and the side wall was a door opening into a passageway along the northern gable wall, back of the altar. When this door was opened you were confronted by the confessional in the corner.

In the other corner back of the altar the priest vested for Mass in a very small sacristy, from which a door led to the epistle side of the sanctuary.

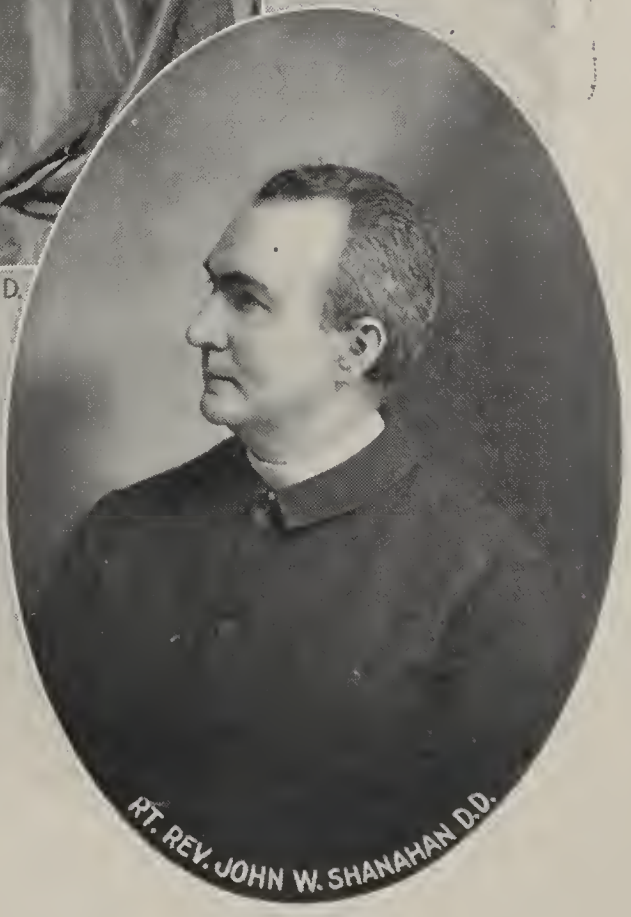
The windows were of plain glass, sashes not weighted, sticks being placed under when air was wanted. Light for the evening services was furnished, at first, by candles, then coal-oil was used, and, lastly, gas fixtures were added.

The altar of the Blessed Virgin, on the right, and the gallery, in the rear, were placed in the church, several years after the dedication. The choir, at first, occupied a platform in the front right hand corner.<sup>4</sup>





RT. REV. EDMUND F. PRENDERGAST D.D.



RT. REV. JOHN W. SHANAHAN D.D.



## CHAPTER IV.

# PASTORS

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St. Aloysius' Church was at first a mission of Phoenixville. Until 1857, either Father O'Farrel, or his assistant, Father Quinn attended Pottstown. In the summer of that year the first resident pastor, Rev. J. D. Davis was sent here by Bishop Neumann.<sup>1</sup>

Although the Douglassville chapel was built prior to the Pottstown church, the former place was attended by the pastors of St. Aloysius' Church. At first, but one Mass was said on a Sunday, Pottstown and Douglassville alternating in the service. When our parish increased, two Masses were said. Once or twice a month the priest went to Douglassville for early Mass, returning to Pottstown to say Mass at half-past ten o'clock. Toward the end of Father Wagner's—and in the beginning of Father Gormley's—pastorate, Mass was still said at Douglassville once a month until the removal of many families, when the service was discontinued on Sunday, although Mass is still said there occasionally on week-days.

From the Sacramental register of St. Aloysius' Church, the following list of pastors has been prepared. The date of the first and last Baptism of each priest gives us a very close idea of the time he spent in Pottstown.

The number of Sacraments administered by each pastor is an interesting index of the growth of the parish. It will be noticed that in a little over a year the first pastor

administered 26 Baptisms, while from 1867 to 1871, Father Sorrenteni had a total of 157, an average of nearly 40 per year. The development of the town, by the organization of the Pottstown Iron Company, in 1866, and the building of the Colebrookdale road, in 1868 and 1869, added to the Catholic congregation.

Father Sorrenteni made trips among the Italian workmen on the railroad to collect from them. From the couples he married he obtained contributions for the marble statue of the Blessed Virgin, which he purchased.

Father Sorrenteni bought a lot on Chestnut street, between Franklin and Evans streets, intending it to be the site of a future church. The deed for this property is dated January 5, 1871. It was conveyed by Edward S. Davies and his wife to Rt. Rev. James Frederic Wood, Bishop of this Diocese. The amount paid was \$1500.

An interval of a few months elapsed between the departure of Father Sorrenteni and the arrival of Rev., now Rt. Rev. John W. Shanahan. In that time Mass was said by priests from Philadelphia—Father D. O'Connor and Father Mulholland.

After the Philadelphia Bridge Works was established here, in 1877, by Cofrode & Saylor, many Catholics came to Pottstown, prominent among whom was the late James B. Kelly, foreman of the blacksmith shop, who came to Pottstown in the fall of 1879. When the new church was built, ten years later, he collected a great deal of money for the building fund. Several other Catholics known to many of us were attracted here by the bridge works.

During the interval of a few months, between the departure of Father Wagner and the appointment of Father Gormley, Rev. Thomas Buckley had charge of the parish.

To this date, thirteen priests have had charge of the parish, as follows:

REV. JOHN D. DAVIS.—Ordained June 10, 1854. First baptism in Pottstown, August 15, 1857; last baptism, August 29, 1858; total number of baptisms, 26; total number of marriages, 5.

REV. WILLIAM F. COOK.—Ordained September 19, 1857. First baptism in Pottstown, October 3, 1858; last baptism, March 9, 1862; total number of baptisms, 56; total number of marriages, 4.

REV. THOMAS McGOVERN.—Ordained December 27, 1861. First baptism in Pottstown, April 6, 1862; last baptism, December 28, 1862; total number of baptisms, 12; total number of marriages, 2. Was afterwards made Bishop of the Harrisburg diocese.

REV. L. I. MILLER.—First baptism in Pottstown, January 11, 1863; last baptism, May 3, 1863; total number of baptisms, 5; no marriages.

REV. THOMAS A. KYLE, O.S.A.—First baptism in Pottstown, March 13, 1863; last baptism, June 23, 1865; total number of baptisms, 29; total number of marriages, 3.

REV. JAMES A. MILLER.—Ordained March 11, 1838. First baptism in Pottstown, July 23, 1865; last baptism, July 7, 1867; total number of baptisms, 35; total number of marriages, 6.

REV. C. SORRENTINI, Missionary Apostolic.—Ordained in Italy. First baptism in Pottstown, August 11, 1867; last baptism, May 13, 1871; total number of baptisms, 157; total number of marriages, 33.

REV. JOHN W. SHANAHAN.—Ordained January 2, 1869. First baptism in Pottstown, August 21, 1871; last baptism, September 19, 1873; total number of baptisms, 66; total number of marriages, 10.

REV. MICHAEL A. MULLIN.—Ordained January 20, 1867. First baptism in Pottstown, October 31, 1873; last baptism, May 17, 1874; total number of baptisms, 18; total number of marriages, 7.

REV. WILLIAM A. McLOUGHLIN.—Ordained June 7, 1873. First baptism in Pottstown, June 14, 1874; last baptism, September 26, 1878; total number of baptisms, 108; total number of marriages, 12.

REV. GERALD P. COGHLAN.—Ordained October 18, 1872. First baptism in Pottstown, November 2, 1878; last baptism, August 20, 1882; total number of baptisms, 101; total number of marriages, 17.

REV. J. A. WAGNER.—Ordained March 15, 1874. First baptism in Pottstown, September 29, 1882; last baptism, 1895; total number of baptisms, 861; total number of marriages, 150.

REV. M. H. GORMLEY.—Ordained June 26, 1886. Appointed to Pottstown, September 1, 1895; total number of baptisms to April 22, 1906, 652; total number of marriages to April 22, 1906, 86.







REV. WM. A. MELOUGHLIN



REV. GERALD P. COGHLAN



REV. JOHN A. WAGNER



REV. M. H. GORMLEY



## CHAPTER V.

### Residences of the Pastors

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For a few years after the dedication there was no fixed place of residence for the pastors. Father Davis, at first, boarded with Mrs. Leh, on High street, near Penn, a non-Catholic, and later took up his residence in the home of Frederick Missimer. Father Cook, who came here in 1858, boarded with James Woods, on South Charlotte street.

Then a separate establishment was provided. A house on King street, next to the present residence of Dr. Heffner, was rented and occupied by Father Cook. From there he moved to the corner of Hanover and Walnut streets, and later resided in the house on Hanover street now occupied by Mr. Daniels. This same house was the home of the next pastor, Father McGovern, who resided there during his stay of nine months.

The two succeeding pastors boarded at John Murphy's hotel. Rev. L. I. Miller made his home there during his brief stay, and then Father Kyle, who was quite old, resided for a time at this hotel.

During the pastorate of Father Kyle a permanent home was provided for the priests. Although the Civil War was in progress, and financial conditions unsettled, Father Kyle built the first rectory. The walls of the church were extended on the north side, and thus the house was made a part of the church building.

The sacristy was provided in the new part, opening into the former small vesting place for the priest. Thus the pastor could reach the confessional and the altar without going out-doors. A door was made to the sacristy from the east side, while the front door was made on the side of Hanover street, which had, in the meanwhile, been extended from Beech street to the north.

Father Kyle occupied this house for the remainder of his stay. Then, in succession, the following pastors resided there: Rev. James A. Miller for two years; Rev. C. Sorrenteni for nearly four years; Rev. John W. Shanahan, for about ten years; Rev. Michael A. Mullin, for about half a year; Rev. W. A. McLoughlin, for over four years; Rev. Gerald P. Coghlan for nearly four years; Rev. J. A. Wagner, for thirteen years, and Rev. M. H. Gormley, for almost three years.

After the new church had been built, in 1891, the old building was left standing, and there was no immediate project of a rectory to correspond with the beautiful church. After the prosperous times, a period of industrial depression followed. The two largest manufacturing concerns failed. The P. & R. shops had been previously removed.

In an unexpected manner the building of a new rectory was made necessary. On Saturday evening, February 12, 1898, sparks from a burning building on the opposite side of Hanover street set fire to the roof of the rectory and old church. The building was badly damaged, but most of the contents were saved.

At Mass, the following day, Father Gormley spoke about the loss. A meeting of the men of the parish was held that week in the hall of the C. B. L., and the pastor was encouraged to start a new building. Father Gormley promptly secured a design for a new rectory.



In spite of the hard times, the subscriptions amounted to \$1600. The fire loss paid by the insurance company was \$1900. The cost of the new structure was nearly \$5000. This left a balance of \$1500 unpaid, which debt was assumed by the congregation.

The walls of the old church were torn down, many men of the parish assisting. For their labor they charged nothing. Thus if their services were credited to them in money, the subscription to the building fund would be much larger.

In the north wall of the old church was found the corner-stone, containing a tin box. Through the thoughtfulness of Mr. J. A. Healy, this box was saved from the debris and preserved.

During the construction of the new rectory a house on Walnut street, west of Hanover, was rented for the use of the pastor. Father Gormley occupied this house until the fall of 1898, when he moved into the completed rectory.



## CHAPTER VI.

### **The Cemetery**

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In the memory of many of the congregation is the graveyard surrounding the old church. They will recall the tombstones, showing here and there in the deep green setting of grass and trees. There lay the earthly remains of the dead, forming with the living worshippers in the church a congregation for the Holy Sacrifice offered up from the altar.

But the time arrived when another cemetery became a necessity. The graveyard was becoming filled. The building of houses and growth of the town around the church made the ground too valuable for a place of interment. A lot on Chestnut street belonged to the congregation and probably, at some future time, the entire church property on Beech street could be sold and a new church erected on Chestnut street, it being more centrally located.

In the beginning of the year of 1882, Father Coghlan secured the tract of land east of the borough, which is now the St. Aloysius Cemetery. On March 2, 1882, the property was conveyed by A. G. Saylor and William H. Smith to Archbishop Wood for \$785.62.

The new cemetery is a tract of 2 acres and 99 perches, fronting 199 feet 3 inches on High street, and extending northeast nearly 700 feet. Kendall Brothers, of Reading, laid out the ground into lots.

At the time of this purchase the new cemetery was considered by some to be rather far from town. The eastern limit of the borough was then Adams street. In the vicinity of the cemetery were very few houses. No trolley road was in existence. Hence there were some who thought they would have a long journey to visit the graves of the departed. I remember hearing my father say in answer to such fears that the distance was not so great, for he could walk it in twenty minutes.

On St. Joseph's Day, 1882, the new cemetery was dedicated. After dinner, that Sunday, the members of St. Aloysius' parish journeyed to the ground. On the wind-swept field the assemblage watched Father Coghlan perform the ceremony of blessing the cemetery. Archbishop Ryan being unable to attend, had delegated Father Coghlan to act in his stead.

My personal recollection of the affair is a mental image of the white surplices of the priest and acolytes against the dark background of the crowd. The candle-lights were extinguished by the wind until some men provided shields of umbrellas and hats.

The first subscribers for lots were in the order in which their names were recorded:

April 2, 1882, John A. Schuyler.  
 April 2, 1882, John Yohn.  
 April 2, 1882, Jacob M. Yohn.  
 April 2, 1882, Joseph M. Yohn.  
 April 3, 1882, Michael Hannigan.  
 April 10, 1882, Mary Hofman.  
 April 10, 1882, Jacob Heil.  
 April 10, 1882, Anton Will.  
 April 10, 1882, John Lutz.  
 April 10, 1882, John Selinger, Sr.  
 April 2, 1882, John Selinger, Jr.  
 June 2, 1882, George Sterling.  
 May, 1882, Fred. S. Missimer.  
 May, 1882, James McKenna.



May, 1882, John Gugerty.  
June, 1882, Aaron Fry.  
June, 1882, Lindley Bauer.  
June, 1882, James Flynn.  
June, 1882, Francis Wingert.  
June, 1882, Edward Haverty.

All the above names in the cemetery book are in Father Coghlan's handwriting. After his removal, in August, of 1882, the names in the book appear in the handwriting of his successor, Father Wagner. As there are so many names, we will not give them, but will leave the work for some historian of future years, who may chance upon the book.

For the purpose of keeping the cemetery in a condition required by our respect for the dead, an annual assessment is collected. Each lot-holder is expected to pay one dollar every year for this purpose.\*

At present the front of the cemetery is attaining a more presentable appearance by the construction of a handsome granite wall





St. Aloysius' New Church, Pottstown, Pa.  
Part of the Old Church is Shown on the Left

## CHAPTER VII.

### The New Church

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For about thirty-five years, the last nine of which were during the pastorate of Rev. J. A. Wagner, the original church was used by the congregation. It at length outgrew the building. For several years the church had been overcrowded. The period of prosperity in Pottstown seemed to be favorable for the erection of a new and larger church.

Father Wagner requested a parish meeting to decide whether a new church should be built. After Benediction, on a Sunday evening, in the spring of 1889, the congregation remained in church. The Blessed Sacrament having been removed, the good pastor asked for opinions concerning the movement.

We can readily imagine the feelings of many in the congregation upon the thought of abandoning the old church. Memories, very dear, were associated with this House of God. If those plain old walls could speak, they would tell of the happy day of the First Communion, of marriages at the altar, of children at the Baptismal font, or of grief when the coffin of a loved one was placed at the foot of the altar. These and many other memories of heavy hearts, lightened by visits to the church, when, before the altar lamp a quiet hour was spent away from the cares of life, and the bustle of the world.

But the old church had fulfilled its mission, and in spite of the most tender memories a new building was to



be erected. The congregation decided to place the new church in the space between the old building and Beech street.

Architect P. A. Welsh, of Philadelphia, prepared plans and specifications, which provided for a structure of 55 feet front, on Hanover street, extending along Beech 105 feet, seating capacity, about 700. The outside walls were to be of Howellville, Chester county, Pennsylvania, rock-faced stone.

The successful bidder for the work above the foundations was Irwin Sassaman, of Pottstown. On August 28, 1889, the contract was signed for the completion of the building, on July 1, 1890, for the sum of \$28,323.

On the afternoon of Sunday, November 17, 1889, the corner-stone of the new church was laid. With the clear sky overhead, a dense crowd on Hanover and Beech streets was packed around a platform at the corner, upon which could be seen the surpliced priests, among whom were the pastor, Rev. J. A. Wagner; Rev. Gerald P. Coghlan, his predecessor; Rev. D. I. McDermott, of St. Mary's Church, Philadelphia; Rev. Eugene Murphy, whose home had been in Pottstown before his ordination. By the side of the priests were the Chief Burgess and members of Town Council. On the platform were also many prominent Catholics from other parishes.

Father Coghlan, acting for Archbishop Ryan, laid the corner-stone. Father McDermott delivered an eloquent sermon, in which he referred to the great benefit the church would be to the congregation. Then he dwelt upon the Catholic Church having Christ for its corner-stone. Continuing, he said:

"More than a mere work of Christ, the laying of this stone is a promise that the great work of saving precious human souls is carried on still, just as really as when He Himself lived and moved among the hills of Judea, and ministered personally for man's salvation.

“He will live here just as truly in His divine doctrine, teaching and Sacramental Presence as He did then, when a simple “I will, be thou whole” proved His personal presence.”

Father McDermott then paid the following tribute to the pastor:

“But, while the work of erecting this monument to God is a great and good one, it is also most arduous and laborious, and an exceedingly heavy tax on him who undertakes it. It requires a priest of sound judgment, persevering industry and indomitable will. Providence has kindly supplied this congregation with such. Who that knows him knows of his earnestness, how he has consecrated himself to the work and has labored earnestly and long. Like the wise man, he has set himself down and counted the cost, and having laid his plans, is rapidly completing them.”

From the Pottstown Daily News of November 18, 1889, the following details about the corner stone have been obtained:

The stone is a handsome block of Indiana limestone, 2 feet 4 inches long; 1 foot wide and 1 foot high.

The contents are as follows:

One copy of the Catholic Standard.

One copy of the Washington Star, giving an account of the Catholic Congress in Baltimore.

Three copies of the Daily News.

United States coins from denomination of one cent to one dollar, dated 1889.

Names of the

President of the United States

Governor of Pennsylvania

Burgess of Pottstown

Architect

Contractor

Master Mason

Builder of the Tower

Pope Leo XIII

Archbishop Ryan

Rev. J. A. Wagner

Instead of being completed in a year, the work extended over two years. The contract did not cover sev-

eral details, the addition of which brought the cost to nearly \$50,000.

It is unnecessary to tell how the money was raised to pay for the edifice. That task is a certainty to a zealous pastor and a sympathetic congregation. Self-denial and hard work are borne with cheerfulness, and the memory of struggles is over when the result is obtained.

At half past ten o'clock, Sunday morning, December 20, 1891, the church was dedicated by Archbishop Ryan. After the blessing of the exterior and interior of the building, Solemn High Mass was sung, Rev. Anthony Wagner, a brother of the pastor, being the celebrant.

The music was rendered by a quartette from Philadelphia, consisting of Miss Jennie McKeon, leader; Miss Kathryn McGuckin, Mr. Walter Hogan and Mr. George Spiel. Hart's orchestra of eight pieces, also of Philadelphia, furnished the instrumental music. Hayden's Mass in C was sung.

As at the corner-stone laying, two years before, Rev. D. I. McDermott preached the sermon. Again the audience listened, spellbound. In his discourse, Father McDermott explained the motive behind the ceremonies of the Catholic service, which, to non-Catholics, seem but empty show. The belief in the Real Presence was shown to be the source of all these apparently meaningless ceremonies. The doctrine that the priests, through power, received from Christ, change bread and wine into His Body and Blood, was proven from the Scriptures and from the history of the Church since its founding. One of the illustrations is as follows:

"Why is it to-day that the people give their richest and best to the church, and why is it that to-day we find in the treasuries of cathedrals and churches chalices of the purest gold, set with precious gems? Simply because those people believed what we believe—that Jesus, Christ would dwell in their tabernacles and that, in the same



spirit that the wise men of the East brought gold and incense to the infant Saviour, the people adorn these houses with gold and silver in the hope of making them worthy of His presence."

The speaker summed up the historical proofs in the following passage:

"Thus, to-day, in this church, from this altar, we can look back into centuries and view the lamps and tabernacles which have been to thousands of our forefathers, and are to thousands of Catholics to-day, sacred, and inspire a spirit of reverence and devotion which only the presence of God can demand, and which is nowhere found as in the Catholic Church."

Having proved that the Word of God is the foundation of our faith, Father McDermott continued:

"Is it any wonder that throughout the Christian world temples, rich and magnificent as this, have sprung up; temples which people in their love and generosity have reared?"

At the conclusion of the sermon, Archbishop Ryan made a brief address, paying a high tribute to the pastor and members of the church for their work now completed. However, His Grace added, that until the structure was free from debt it would not be entirely God's house, urging the people to persevere, for the Divine reward, to clear the encumbrance.

About four years after the dedication Father Wagner was transferred by Archbishop Ryan to Phoenixville. By that time the debt upon the church was \$4600.





## CHAPTER VIII.

### **The Parish Debt Association**

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A few years after the dedication of the church the prosperous conditions in Pottstown began to wane. The two principal industries failed and many men were thrown out of employment. St. Aloysius' congregation lost many members by death and removal from town. During this period of depression the church revenues fell off and there was no possibility of reducing the debt on the church.

In 1900 the industrial condition of Pottstown began to improve. In that year the McClintic-Marshall Construction Company purchased the plant of Cofrode & Saylor. The new firm, by extraordinary energy, is taking front rank with structural iron producers. The works have expanded, and now about 700 men are employed. Other industries have located here. Thus good times are once more prevailing in Pottstown.

With the return of good times, Father Gormley began the work of reducing the debt on the church property. In 1901 the Parish Debt Society was organized, to pay off the debt on the church by means of monthly contributions from the members. The society, at present, numbers about 500. The collectors, at this time, are:

George Conrad,  
Sarah A. Clemmer,  
Bernard Dunn,  
James D. Gorman,

James H. S. Griess,  
Charles Normandin,  
Frank Missimer,  
Frank Miller,  
William Raidy,  
Jonas Schwoyer,  
W. B. Schuyler,  
James W. Welsh,  
Irvin F. Wummer,  
Mrs. Wentzel,  
Adolph Wilke,  
Francis J. Ziegler.

Since its inception, the society has raised about \$5000, paying off the debt of \$1500 on the rectory and reducing the church debt, on January 1, 1906, to \$1000.





## CHAPTER IX.

### Pottstown's Representatives in the Priesthood

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St. Aloysius' congregation has contributed the following six priests to the Church:

REV. JOSEPH WOODS, S.J.—Professor of ecclesiastical history in Woodstock College, Maryland. He is a son of James Woods, deceased, one of the founders of St. Aloysius' Church.

REV. EUGENE M. MURPHY.—Ordained May 20, 1888. Rector of St. John the Baptist's Church, Manayunk. His father was John Murphy, now dead, one of the original congregation.

REV. JOSEPH C. HANNIGAN.—Ordained January 6, 1892. Assistant rector of St. Ann's Church, Philadelphia. His father, John Hannigan, now dead, was one of the builders of St. Paul's Chapel, Douglassville.

REV. PETER KELLY.—Ordained September, 1895. Rector of the church at Oxford, N. J., diocese of Trenton. While not a native of Pottstown, Father Kelly's home was here for several years previous to his ordination. His father was the late James B. Kelly, who came here in 1879.

REV. FRANCIS J. WELSH.—Ordained June 9, 1900. Rector of Church of the Sacred Heart, Harrisburg, diocese of Harrisburg. His father was John B. Welsh (now deceased), one of the congregation of fifty years ago.

REV. HENRY C. SCHUYLER, S.T.L.—Ordained December 16, 1903. Assistant rector of St. Patrick's Church, Norristown. He is a son of the late John A. N. Schuyler.

## Notes to Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup>All the references to local history are taken from the "History of Pottstown," by L. H. Davis.

<sup>2</sup>Pennsylvania Archives, Vol XVII. This volume contains lists of the foreigners taking the oath of allegiance required prior to the Revolution. All males over sixteen years of age were obliged to take this oath and declaration as soon after their arrival as possible, being marched to the court house, or were sometimes qualified at the official residence of the magistrate. Among the record of the immigrants brought on the ship "Francis and Elizabeth," from Rotterdam, who qualified on September 21, 1742, we find Melchior Schaner. This name has been spelled in various ways: Schaner, Schoner, Shiner and, at present, Shaner. Anna and Catherine Schoner had several brothers, whose descendants are very numerous. We have no evidence that the brothers were Catholics.

<sup>3</sup>The description of Mrs. Jones' property, and reference to her faith, are based on statements of A. K. Shaner, who being now 71 years old is an authority on matters of the history of early inhabitants of Pottstown.

<sup>4</sup>Record of her descendants.

<sup>5</sup>Her will, recorded in Will Book No. 3, p. 538, in the Register of Wills' office, Norristown, Pa.

<sup>6</sup>Statement of Jacob M. Yohn, from his recollection.

<sup>7</sup>Pennsylvania Archives, Vol. XVII. In the list of foreigners "imported on the ship 'Two Brothers'" from Rotterdam, and qualifying September 21, 1751, are three names: Johan Jacob Molsberger, Johannes Molsberger and William Molsberger. The first mentioned is evidently the one who married Catherine Schoner, as Mr. A. K. Shaner says that she married John Malsberger, but in the Goshenhoppen records (quoted later) the husband's name is Jacob. This name has been spelled in several ways: Molsberger, Maulsberger, Maltzberger and, at present, Malsberger.

<sup>8</sup>The Sacramental Register of Goshenhoppen, entitled: "Book of those Baptized, Married and Buried at Philadelphia, in Cushenhoppen, Maxetani, Magunschi, Tulpehaken, etc. Begun Anno Domini 1741." Translation published in the Records of the American Catholic Historical Society.

<sup>9</sup>The description of this property, sold in 1812 by the executors of Jacob Maulsberger, shows it to be bounded by the land of John Schoner, Peter Richards, David Potts, Jacob Mauger, Chas. Mauger,

Christian Bliem, Valentine Steltz. The western boundary of the tract was the Swamp road (Charlotte street).

<sup>10</sup>Pennsylvania Archives, Vol 14, page 44.

<sup>11</sup>Same, Vol. 14, page 331.

<sup>12</sup>Same, Vol. 15, page 513.

<sup>13</sup>Deed described in Note 9.

<sup>14</sup>The will of Jacob Malsberger, probated 1805, made the following disposition of his property: One-third to his wife, Catherine; 100 shillings to his son Joseph; 150 shillings to his daughter Elizabeth. The residue was to be divided into seven equal shares, one share to be given to each of the following: His son Jacob; his daughter Catherine's children; his daughter Susanna's children; his daughter Peggy; his daughter Mary; his daughter Elizabeth; his son Joseph. The value of his personal property was £1389 4s. 8d. The real estate sold in 1812 for \$12,358.50.

<sup>14</sup>Information from my mother, who is a granddaughter of Jacob Malsberger 2d. His sister Catherine married ——— Obold, and removed to Conewago, Pa.

<sup>15</sup>From Dr. John Gilmary Shea's "History of the Catholic Church in America."

<sup>16</sup>See note 8. Pottstown Catholics will be interested to learn that the first entry in Father Schneider's Sacramental Register is of a baptism, in 1741, at the house of a John Utzman, at Falkner's Swamp, about five miles north of Pottstown.

<sup>17</sup>Elizabeth Malsberger told my mother that the early Catholics, having no church of their own to attend, sometimes accompanied their non-Catholic friends to worship.

<sup>18</sup>Mother tells me that Father Bally, on his way from Goshenhoppen to Philadelphia, frequently stopped at the house of John Yohn, my mother's father. This priest was a great friend of Father Barbelin, of Philadelphia. Mother recalls a time when Father Barbelin, having come to her home with Father Bally, gave her a small picture, which she prized very highly.

## **Notes to Chapter 2**

<sup>1</sup>Information furnished by Mrs. Daniel Healy, whose parents were among the original settlers.

<sup>2</sup>Information of John Foreman.

<sup>3</sup>Article of A. K. Shaner in the "Pottstown Ledger."

<sup>4</sup>John Donnelly ran the first engine imported from England for the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad. He was killed on the railroad at Neversink three years before the building of the church. He was the father of Mrs. Sarah Kelly.



<sup>5</sup>Mrs. Katherine Rigney informed me that her father, Anthony Dunn, took the family to Douglassville on a "manual lever." She described her pleasure in going on such a trip.

<sup>6</sup>Article by T. E. Mullin in the "Phoenixville Republican," March 9, 1903.

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### Notes to Chapter 3

<sup>1</sup>Information of John Foreman and Frank Ziegler.

<sup>2</sup>After the old church and rectory were damaged by fire in 1898, the laborers tearing down the walls discovered the cornerstone in the north wall. They threw the tin box contained in the stone upon a heap of debris, from which it was rescued by J. Allen Healy, who preserved it for its historical value.

In the copy of the "Catholic Observer" placed in the cornerstone is a list of those who had paid subscriptions in advance. Among that number is the name of Robert Gue, of Pottstown.

<sup>3</sup>To determine the date of the dedication, files of the "Catholic Herald and Visitor" for 1855 and 1856 have been carefully scanned, as well as Catholic magazines of that time, but with no success. Rev. Edward J. Curran, a student at St. Charles' Seminary, has furnished me with the following extracts from the "Catholic Almanac," published in the beginning of the years 1854, 1855 and 1856.

In the issue for 1854: "Pottstown, Berks Co.—Visited by Rev. Philip O'Farrell, of Phoenixville."

In the issue of 1855: "Montgomery Co.—Pottstown (church being built)—attended from Phoenixville."

In the issue of 1856: "Montgomery Co.—Pottstown, St. Aloysius—attended from Phoenixville."

For the matter in relation to the Phoenixville visitors on the day of the dedication I am indebted to Mr. T. E. Mullin, of Phoenixville.

<sup>4</sup>Information received from my mother.

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### Notes to Chapter 4

<sup>1</sup>The title of the earliest records of St. Aloysius' Church is "Baptismal Register of St. Aloysius' Church, Pottstown, August 1, 1857. J. D. Davis (First Resident Pastor)."

<sup>2</sup>Information from my mother.

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### Notes to Chapter 5

<sup>1</sup>My mother furnished data about the residences of the first pastors. She was instructed for her first communion by Father Davis.





JUN 14 1880



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